



Winchester Public Schools
154 Horn Pond Brook Road
Winchester, MA 01890

Superintendent's Office

November 4, 2009

Dear Parents,

I am writing this letter to update you on recent developments regarding the H1N1 Influenza and associated issues for the Winchester Public Schools. Over the course of the last week we have seen an increase in student absences for "flu like symptoms." We are monitoring this situation as well as tracking both student and staff attendance on a daily basis. In addition, we are working closely with the Winchester Health Department.

Last Spring the district made an effort to install hand sanitizer dispensers in all elementary classrooms except in those schools where there was a sink in classrooms. We have found that although soap and water is effective more frequent and regular hand washing is apparent when hand sanitizer is readily available. Given that, we are working with our facility staff to provide dispensers in those elementary classrooms that do not have them. In the middle school and high school we are working hard to provide individual pump bottles of sanitizer in classrooms as well as key areas of the building. Last spring the High School PFA provided the sanitizer bottles for the school – thank you! We are also working with staff in asking them to be vigilant about reminding students about the importance of regularly using sanitizer or washing hands as well as proper cough etiquette.

The Department of Public Health has issued an "Influenza Guidance" to all school districts. Three of their recommendations are found below:

- **Make sure that sick students, teachers and staff stay home.** Inform parents that they should assess children for symptoms of influenza before sending them to school. ILI symptoms include fever plus cough and/or sore throat. It may also include other symptoms, such as vomiting or diarrhea. Distribute the *Flu Symptom Checklist* to families and ask that parents use it if they are unsure if their child is well enough to go to school. Distribute it to staff as well. Keeping people with a fever at home will reduce the number of people who get infected.

- **Encourage early medical evaluation of high-risk students and staff** who have conditions that put them at increased risk of complications from the flu (heart disease, asthma, diabetes, pregnancy, weakened immune systems, and certain muscle and nerve disorders that can lead to breathing or swallowing problems). If your child has a medical condition, it is recommended that you consult with his/her pediatrician.
- **All sick students and staff should stay home for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever. This fever-free period *must* be without the use of fever-reducing medicines**, like Motrin (ibuprofen) or Tylenol (acetaminophen). They should stay home until at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever even if they are taking antiviral medicines. Many people can expect to stay home for about 4 days: about 3 days with fever and one more day with no fever and no fever reducing medicines. However, the fever with influenza can last 2-5 days or more, so students and staff should be prepared to stay home as long as it takes to become fever-free for 24 hours.

Attached is a copy of the **Flu Symptom Checklist**

We realize how difficult it can be at times to keep children home especially when they don't seem to be "too sick." By following the guidelines noted above all students and all schools will have an increased chance of minimizing, to the extent possible, the number of absences due to this illness. Your cooperation is deeply appreciated and most important.

As soon as H1N1 vaccine becomes available in sufficient quantity, the Winchester Health Department will begin school-based clinics. The clinics will start with Kindergarten students and proceed through the 12th grade as quantities allow.

Please do not hesitate to contact your school nurse if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely yours,

William H. McAlduff, Jr.

William H. McAlduff, Jr.
Superintendent of Schools

***The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health***

Flu Symptom Check List for Families and Schools

Updated August 31, 2009

The main symptoms of influenza (flu) include **fever and cough and/or sore throat**. Some people also have a runny nose, body aches, headache, chills and feel tired. Some people also have diarrhea and vomiting. The most important thing that you can do to keep flu from spreading in the community is to keep your sick child at home when they are sick.

SHOULD I KEEP MY CHILD HOME?

☐ Yes ☐ No Has your child had a fever of 100.4 degrees or more in the past 24 hours?

☐ Yes ☐ No Does your child have a cough **OR** sore throat?

If you answered YES to both questions above, keep your child home.

Your child has an influenza-like illness.

CAN MY CHILD RETURN TO SCHOOL?

☐ Yes ☐ No Has your child had a fever of 100.4 degrees or more in the past 24 hours?

☐ Yes ☐ No Has your child had acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil) in the past 24 hours?

If you answered NO to both questions above, your child can return to school.

**If you answered YES to either one of the questions above, your child
CANNOT return to school.**

Keep your child home for at least another day to observe for additional symptoms. Then use the check list questions again to decide whether you should continue to keep your child home.

Where can I find more information about influenza?

- 1) Call the Massachusetts Department of Public Health information line: 211
- 2) Go to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health influenza website: mass.gov/flu
- 3) A "Fever Fact Sheet" with information on how to take a temperature is also available.